

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 103 NO. 2 SPRING 2019

FLYING HIGH WITH VOLUNTEERS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Each October, Eileen Richey opens the nest boxes at Golden Gate Park's Bison Paddock to document results of the Tree Swallow nesting season. Some years are discouraging, with nothing but broken eggs and dead chicks. Fall 2018, though, was different. Six of the eleven nest boxes showed evidence of successful broods.

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Tree Swallow feeding fledgling.
Jerry Ting



Pied Billed Grebe with youngsters.

CELEBRATING THE CAN-DO SPIRIT OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This *Gull* issue arrives at the beginning of our most ambitious Birdathon ever. We sure couldn't do that without great volunteers! There's a dynamic Birdathon committee who helps us with every aspect: recommending and curating which trips to offer, recruiting people to lead those special trips, enlisting sponsors and prizes for eventual Birdathon winners, planning the delightful Birdathon Awards Celebration that will take place on May 19 (mark your calendars!), and even more. Volunteers make it happen!

This spring, you might find yourself tuning in to the Pacific Coast's only Osprey webcam on our very popular SFBayOspreys.org site. This signature project wouldn't have been possible to launch, or manage, without the involvement of truly amazing volunteers who help in crucial ways.

Volunteers have long been the heartbeat of our organization: they magnify our organization's impact hundreds fold. And that's not an exaggeration. We do all of our work with a small staff: just five people. However, we accomplish so much because of

our secret force. We're honored to engage the energy, talents, knowledge, and expertise of about 2,700 volunteers annually. I'm fiercely proud of our volunteers because their skills are so salient and their can-do attitude so powerful.

We have career scientists, attorneys, arborists, teachers, writers, photographers, and so many other knowledgeable individuals graciously sharing their expertise to advance our mission. I sometimes wonder if the founders of Golden Gate Audubon would recognize our organization today? Of course, they'd recognize us! Today, our organization attracts so many volunteers, and inspires tens of thousands more through our SFBayOspreys.org project. But Golden Gate Audubon is imbued with that same original empowering spirit, that same willingness to face any conservation challenge with an all-important positive attitude. What's the first thing we do when a challenge arises? We consider our incredible cadre of volunteers! We figure out what expertise we have on our team, not just the five people on our staff, but our dedicated Board members, and our devoted veteran volunteers. We summon some of those key minds, develop a strategy, and decide how we'll collectively engage to be most effective.

In the earliest days of GGAS, it was oil-contaminated ballast water being dumped off the Farallon Islands that mobilized the first volunteers to demand an end to ballast-water dumping by shipping companies. And it worked! The teeming bird colonies and marine mammal rookeries there today, right off our shore, are a living tribute to the effectiveness of our volunteers.

NEWS BRIEFS

Oakland CBC Totals

261 observers braved the rain for Oakland's 78th CBC. Perhaps partially due to weather, lower numbers of most species were recorded. The total of 85,269 birds was nearly 12,000 below Oakland's 10-year average. To read the report go to our blog *Misses Marked 2018's Oakland Christmas Bird Count*.

Rosie and Richmond Return

Osprey Webcam stars Rosie and Richmond have reunited. Go to SFBayOspreys.org to have an up close, "bird's-eye view" of the ongoing bonding and courtship of their new season together. The incubating, hatching, and fledging drama of raising a family will play out over the next several months.

Join the Conversation

Golden Gate Audubon has a new chat group. We hope this group will be a forum for issues of interest to GGAS members and others. It's a great place for discussions, questions, updates on GGAS activities, and for general birding conversations. Membership is free at groups.io/g/GGAS-Chat.

Audubon CA Advocacy Day May 7th in Sacramento

2019 Advocacy Day will focus on funding for state wildlife protection, parks and open space, water and ensuring that California remains at the forefront in fighting climate change. Attendees can speak with their representatives about their district priorities.

VOLUNTEERS CONTINUED from page 1

“It’s the moment of truth when we find out what happened,” Richey said. “This time we found matted-down nests, fecal sacs, and no dead babies—signs of successful nests. We were elated.”

Richey is one of over 2,700 volunteers working with Golden Gate Audubon Society, an astonishing number for a local nonprofit with just five paid staff. GGAS volunteers fill a wide range of roles—everything from teaching children about nature to lobbying local governments on behalf of wildlife and habitat.

“GGAS is particularly good at mobilizing people of all different backgrounds, skills, and ages, from a child planting a seedling to an adult with years of professional knowledge analyzing an Environmental Impact Report,” said GGAS Executive Director Cindy Margulis.

Some snapshots of those 2,700 participants:

Habitat restoration. Over 1,900 volunteers removed 479 bags of weeds, trash, and recyclables from eight public sites in 2018, along with planting native plants and installing bins to recycle used fishing line.

Field trips. Sixty-three expert volunteers led 192 bird walks last year. “I personally gained a lot from field trips and I wanted to give back,” explained David Assmann, who has led monthly walks at Fort Mason for about four years. “Fort Mason is such a wonderful place that I want to share it with others.”



Barn Owl in flight.



Veteran trip leader Bob Lewis.

The kids get really excited seeing birds up close, even ones as common as robins. Some of them say, This is the best day ever!”

Conservation advocacy. GGAS conservation committees for San Francisco, Alameda, and the East Bay draw upon members’ legal, writing, science, and advocacy skills to champion wildlife-friendly policies.

Eco-Education. Volunteers guide Title 1 inner-city schoolchildren during activities on field trips in GGAS’s award-winning Eco-Education program, helping them discover local wildlife and ecosystems.

“I always bring my scope,” said Eco-Ed volunteer Herb Long. “The kids get really excited seeing birds up close, even ones as common as robins. Some of them say, ‘This is the best day ever!’”

Docents. Those friendly folks offering to show you birds through a scope at Lake Merritt, Cesar Chavez Park, and along the Bay Trail? GGAS volunteers, of course.

Community science. The Christmas Bird Count is Audubon’s most famous community science event, but GGAS volunteers also monitor specific bird populations, including endangered California Least Terns, species of special concern Burrowing Owls, and at-risk Black Oystercatchers.

Along with all this, GGAS taps the skills of volunteer photographers, artists, writers, and fundraisers—as well as office assistants and event volunteers.

Many GGAS volunteers are longtime members who, like David Assmann, feel grateful for what they’ve learned from GGAS and want to “give back.” But others are completely new to the world of birding and nature.

Director of Volunteer Programs Noreen Weeden does a masterful job of connecting GGAS with corporations and community groups looking for service opportunities. Salesforce sent a whopping 872 employees to volunteer with GGAS last year—restoring habitat, building Barn Owl boxes, creating nature journals for schoolchildren, and helping with a campaign to keep wildlife safe by discouraging rodenticide use.

For Eileen Richey, nest box monitoring was an opportunity to do something meaningful in her retirement. Since 2009, she’s gone out about once a week each spring to monitor nesting activity from a spot outside the Paddock. Then in the fall, the bison are moved away so she can enter and clean the boxes. The birds benefit—but so does she.

“I love being an observer of the natural world, while supporting these bird populations,” she said. “It was so nice this fall to open the boxes and see the nests completed and the chicks gone.”



James Scott

Snowy Egret.

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF AN URBAN LAKE

JONATHAN YOUNG

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, April 18
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

Please note new San Francisco venue at Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street.

San Francisco's Mountain Lake, neglected and degraded through centuries of urbanization, became a cesspool of invasive wildlife, toxic algae blooms, and poor water quality. Many native species that depended on the lake succumbed to local extinction, pushing the lake's health further past the precipice. Beginning in the early 21st century, the newly formed Presidio National Park began to actively shift the ecological trajectory by restoring the health and function of the lake with terrestrial and aquatic vegetation, wildlife reintroductions, and stormwater runoff management. Join Presidio Trust Wildlife Ecologist Jonathan Young as he journeys through the socio-ecological past, present, and future of Mountain Lake.

Jonathan Young began his relationship with the Presidio restoring habitat as a volunteer in 2010. Jon completed his Master's degree studying amphibian conservation and disease ecology at San Francisco State University. He is the first Presidio Trust staff member fully dedicated to the park's wildlife.

San Francisco: New venue! Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street, San Francisco.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: Visit northbrae.org/contact--find-us.html.

ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION OF THE GULF OF THE FARALLONES

PETER PYLE

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, May 16
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

The Gulf of the Farallones lies within an "Eastern Boundary Current System," where cold ocean currents and other environmental factors lead to high ocean productivity. Peter's talk will cover the ecology and conservation of the Gulf's breeding and pelagic seabirds. Learn about some of the Gulf's key-stone species and the excellent research that has been undertaken in the Gulf resulting in conservation and management action.

Peter Pyle is a consultant for the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary's Beach Watch program and a Research Associate at the California Academy of Sciences and the B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu. He currently works as a staff biologist for the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes Station.



BAY AREA WOODPECKERS

JEFFERY R. MARTIN

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, June 20
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

Please note new San Francisco venue at Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street.

Woodpeckers have captured the human imagination for generations. The distant sounds of pecking, flashes of red plumage, and inevitable disappearance into the shadows of the forest evoke a sense of wonder about these extraordinary yet elusive creatures. From the exquisite green and rose-colored Lewis's Woodpecker to the dazzling Northern Flicker, and more, this presentation takes a close-up look at the worlds of our eight North Bay Woodpeckers.

Jeffery Martin is a videographer and naturalist. He is a frequent presenter for many local Audubon chapters and the Pt. Reyes National Seashore. He leads natural history walks and lectures for adults and children.



INSPIRING SCIENCE WITH SFBAYOSPREYS.ORG

BY LESLIE WEIR

Golden Gate Audubon is celebrating the return of our favorite Osprey Webcam stars, Rosie and Richmond. Since 2017, tens of thousands of viewers have been captivated by the courtship, nest building, offspring, and seasonal reunification of this bonded pair. Our SFBayOspreys.org website also offers an easy opportunity to participate in community science to learn about our local ospreys and the ecosystem of the San Francisco Bay.

Webcam observers on the Live Chat page of the website can contribute to data collection on the fishing abilities of Rosie, Richmond and their offspring. Live chatters report on fish arrivals to the nest and are welcome to post a screen shot. With an ever-growing data set, we can begin to identify patterns and find answers to questions like:

- Does the male or female osprey bring more fish to the nest?
- How do the ratios and species of fish brought to the nest change from month-to-month?
- How often is human made debris brought to the nest by the birds?
- Does the volume of fish deliveries increase when there are nestlings to feed?

Why is it important to find these answers?

Non-disruptive wildlife observations of this type contribute to scientific understanding of distribution of resources and important insights about species survival. Additionally, the increased understanding of our Ospreys and their habits can aid in developing human behaviors to protect these birds and other Bay wildlife. For example, the Ospreys' youngest nestling (named Brisa by the GGAS community) became entangled in a wad of ribbon attached to plastic brought in by a parent last season, threatening her ability to move about in the nest and to fledge. For the Live Chat community,



Osprey Richmond delivering a small Jacksmelt to the family.

noting that the Ospreys often bring human made materials back to the nest, this was a harsh reminder of the need to keep the whole watershed free from urban debris. Fortunately, Brisa was able to free herself and shortly after fledged without incident.

This unique community science project has the added benefit of publishing real-time data that Bay Area schoolteachers can use to create lessons about Ospreys and Bay ecology. By contributing to the environmental education of students, the Fish Counting Matrix and our Osprey Webcam stars inspire the next generation to care for the birds and the Bay ecosystem, perhaps creating future leaders of the conservation movement.

To join this valuable community science project in 2019, go to SFBayOspreys.org and follow the Live Chat link. The complete data set is at the bottom of the page where it can be viewed or downloaded.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oakland Zoo

Earth Day

Sunday, April 14
10 am – 3 pm

Enjoy a day of animals, music, and exceptional wildlife and conservation organizations from all over the Bay Area, including GGAS. Visit oaklandzoo.org/programs-and-events/earth-day.

Earth Day

Saturday, April 20

Golden Gate Audubon will have an Earth Day volunteer restoration event at Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline Park from 9:30-noon and at the Presidio in San Francisco from 9 to noon. RSVP for the Presidio event at <https://bit.ly/2EpD4o8>.

City Nature Challenge

April 26–29

The San Francisco Bay Area was a winner in i-naturalist and ebird observations last year. Can it hold the title this year? Yes, if you and your friends participate in this community science opportunity. For more information go to citynaturechallenge.org

Mt. Sutro BioBlitz

Sunday, April 28
8:30 am – noon

Please help GGAS lead the birding effort for this intensive field study and biological survey of Mt. Sutro. For more information about participating, please send an email to volunteer@goldengateaudubon.org.

Bringing Back the Natives

Sunday, May 5

Annual East Bay native garden tour. Learn more about how birds depend on native plants and enjoy a day outdoors visiting stunning native plant gardens. For more information go to bringingbackthenatives.net.

International Migratory Bird Day

Saturday May 11

This year's theme is "be the solution to plastic pollution." Think before you buy and join us for a beach maintenance event. Check our Volunteer Page for habitat restoration opportunities.

DONATIONS

Thank you for joining our donor community.

Donations from December 1, 2018 to February 28, 2019

With gratitude to every individual, business, and organization who made a recent donation. Large or small, the gifts you send support our conservation, education and member programs, and benefit the birds you love.

GOLDEN EAGLE (\$1000 and above)

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BIRDATHON

Above and Beyond for Birdathon

We are grateful to these volunteers who have put in the extra effort and created personal fundraising pages for Birdathon.

Dianne Ayres	Dan Harris	Sharol Nelson-Embry
Chris and Gary Bard	Anne Hoff	Dan Roth
Linda Carloni	Maureen Lahiff	Eric Schroeder and Susan Palo
Laura Cremin	Bob Lewis	Alex Smolyanskaya
Ryan Gilpin and Melissa Orozco	Bruce Mast	Leslie Storer
	Prerona Mukherjee	Diane Winkler



It's not too late to join them! Go to goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2019/ and press the Create My Personal Page button. Take advantage of this great opportunity to tell friends and family what GGAS means to you while also raising money to help Bay Area birds.

There is still space available on many of our one-of-a-kind Birdathon 2019 experiences. Go to goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon-2019-fundraising-trips for trip schedule and registration.

Thank You to our Birdathon 2019 Corporate Sponsors

\$1000 and above	\$500 and above	\$250 and above
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Birdathon 2019 Trip Leaders

Birdathon would never be possible without the generosity of our trip leaders who donate their time, energy, talents and out-of-pocket expenses to provide memorable experiences. Thank you to:

- Dave Quady (*Greater Sage Grouse, March 22*)
Anne Ardillo & George Eade (*Raptors at Skaggs Island, March 23*)
Leslie Storer, Tom & Diane Bennett (*Behind the Scenes at the Oakland Zoo, March 24*)
Jack Dumbacher (*Behind the Scenes at the Cal Academy, March 28*)
Joyce Mercado & Sharol Nelson-Embry (*Birds and Chocolate at Elsie Roemer, March 30*)
Glen Tepke (*Birds! Camera! Action!, March 31*)
Dan & Joan Murphy (*Birding San Francisco, April 6 & Birding the Peninsula, April 13*)
Rusty Scalf (*CA Condors at the Pinnacles w/ Richard Neidhardt, April 6 & Birding Pt. Reyes, April 27 and 28*)
Wendy Beers & Miya Lucas (*Grasshopper Sparrows at Garin Regional Park, April 8*)
Bob Lewis (*Elkhorn Slough Safari, April 9 & Hayward shoreline, May 4 & Napa River, April 27*)
Alan Hopkins (*Best of the Presidio, April 13*)
Bruce Mast (*Birds and Wine, April 14*)
Clay Anderson (*Valle Vista, April 14*)
Ryan Phillips (*Santa Cruz Mountains, April 20*)
Tony Brake & Yvonne McHugh (*Marin Headlands Schooner Sail, April 20*)
Dominik Mosur (*South Bay Salt Ponds, April 20*)

- Steve & Carol Lombardi (*Mines Road, April 26*)
Cindy Margulis (*Corvid Connection, April 27*)
Maureen Lahiff (*Mitchell Canyon, April 28*)
Carla Cicero & Allen Fish (*UCB Dept. of Zoology*)
Denise Wight (*Birding by Ear, May 5*)
Alan Kaplan (*Inspiration Point, May 10*)
Gary Adest & Joan Parker (*Tule Transect, May 14*)
Shira Kammen (*Flights of Fancy Concert, May 18*)
Alan Harper & Carol Baird (*Celebration Garden Party, May 19*)
John Ehrenfeld (*Lake Berryessa Ospreys, May 25*)
Scott Young (*Birding by Air, online auction*)



Ilana DeBare

ROSTER

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon engages people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect native bird populations and their habitats.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. However, GGAS receives no portion of dues from National Audubon. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office.

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Learn about upcoming Golden Gate Audubon events every month! Send your name and email address to ggas@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our monthly e-newsletters with upcoming events and other news.

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Visit our online store at goldengateaudubon.org/store.

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2 The Can-Do Spirit of our Volunteers
Volunteers are the heartbeat of GGAS and magnify the impact of the organization a hundred fold.

4 Speaker Series
San Francisco Speaker Series has moved to the new venue at Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street.

5 Observation and SFBayOspreys.org
Tens of thousands of viewers are captivated by the courtship, nest building, and offspring of Ospreys Rosie and Richmond.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bob Gunderson

Lesser Goldfinch.

THE LESSER GOLDFINCH
BY CATHY BLEIER

Spring is here. Hills are greening up, fruit trees blossoming and breeding bird song is beginning to fill the air. In the Bay Area migrant species are arriving while resident species, such as the Lesser Goldfinch, brighten up their plumage and with it, our yards and open spaces.

The Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) is our smallest goldfinch, measuring 3.5 to 4.5 inches and weighing a third to a half ounce. Sexually dimorphic in plumage, the males have black foreheads and crowns while females have olive-colored heads. Both sexes are

yellow in front (throat to belly) with olive green backs (unlike the bright yellow of American Goldfinch) and obvious white patches on the wings and tail. The species is also geographically dimorphic; in Texas and their eastern range most male birds have black backs.

You may recognize the Lesser Goldfinch before you see it. Its plaintive—some say mournful—descending *tee-yer* call is unmistakable. Its flight can also help with identification: a rapid and scalloped (dipping) pattern. The Lesser Goldfinch’s extended songs are varied, rapid mixes of tweets, trills, chirps and whistles. These incorporate mimicry (imitation) of other bird song phrases—a talent shared with only a few other species. They prefer open habitats of grass, forbs, shrubs and scattered trees, and can be found in our parks and backyards.

The Lesser Goldfinch nests in much of the Bay Area, usually between April and August. Females weave tight cup-shaped nests of plant fibers, and lay 3 to 6 pale blue eggs. They eat seeds, buds and flowers, and are especially fond of thistles, dandelions and sunflowers, so make sure you leave some flower heads intact after they bloom! Native shrubs and trees used for food and nesting include oaks, willows, alders, Ceanothus, and Salvias. Unlike sparrows and some other seed eaters, they prefer feeding on standing plants rather than foraging on the ground; more entertainment for us when they hang upside down to do it!

Fortunately for us, Lesser Goldfinch populations are stable and possibly increasing. Their range is also expanding, probably due to development, which brings water and food sources. So enjoy them this spring as they bring color, song and chicks to our gardens, farms and open spaces.